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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SKOPJE 000102

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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA'S OPPOSITION: DISENGAGEMENT AND DISARRAY

REF: 06 SKOPJE 1174 & PREVIOUS

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D).

SUMMARY.

¶1. (C) Frustrated over the lack of a genuine political dialogue with the government, Macedonia's main eAlbanian opposition party DUI is boycotting the Parliament and considering cutting ties between the municipalities it controls and the central government. DUI leaders cite a list of demands, including genuine dialogue on key issues of concern to the party, that the government would have to meet before DUI could consider returning to the Parliament. In the meantime, the main opposition party, SDSM, is internally divided and in disarray, while the Prime Minister and President Crvenkovski engage in ugly verbal sparring that further muddies the political landscape. Our message to all the parties is to get back in the political process, start making constructive proposals to move the country forward on its Euro-Atlantic integration course, and work to achieve concrete results before it is too late to demonstrate Macedonia's value as a NATO candidate capable of contributing to security and stability in the region and abroad. End Summary.

DISENGAGEMENT: DUI BOYCOTTS PARLIAMENT....

¶2. (U) DUI, Macedonia's largest ethnic Albanian party, which is in opposition, publicly announced on January 27 that it would boycott the Parliament, effective immediately. In addition to the parliamentary walkout, DUI decided to freeze its participation in the National Security Council and in the government's inter-ministerial Working Group on NATO Integration. The party cited the ongoing lack of genuine political dialogue (reftel), and the "marginalization" of eAlbanians in the Parliament through the manipulation of qualified majority voting as the main reasons for the walkout.

...AND THREATENS MUNICIPAL SELF-ISOLATION

¶3. (U) Since the announcement, DUI party leaders have been meeting with DUI mayors in the 15 municipalities the party controls (all but one of a total of 16 eAlbanian municipalities have DUI mayors) to discuss allegations that the GOM has been, inter alia, pressuring those municipalities by shortchanging them in the distribution of decentralization funds. DUI leaders will decide in the next few weeks what actions to take at the municipal level, including possibly cutting cooperation with the central government and dropping

out of the non-governmental Association of Units of Local Self-government (ZELS).

DUI COMPLAINTS ABOUT LACK OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE AND ATTEMPTS TO DISMANTLE THE PARTY

14. (SBU) Senior DUI contacts recite a litany of complaints against the government, including a complete lack of civil political discourse and allegations that eAlbanian governing coalition partner DPA has been pressuring DUI members through various forms of intimidation in an attempt to dismantle the party. They claim that PM Gruevski is trying falsely to paint the current political impasse as a result of intra-Albanian polarization. They also argue that Gruevski has failed to recognize DUI's current status as the political representative of the majority of eAlbanians in Macedonia, given its electoral victory over DPA in 2006.

15. (C) DUI VP Teuta Arifi complained during a February 1 meeting with us that the Parliament's recent decision to approve several amendments to a broadcasting law without using qualified majority voting, even though that law had itself been passed with a qualified majority vote, was a clear example of the government's disdain for "correct parliamentary procedures" as mandated by the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement (FWA). She said that DUI cadres are becoming "more militant" as they perceive the FWA is under attack, but she ruled out any resort to violent action as a political tactic.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

16. (C) Both Arifi and DUI Spokesperson Ermira Mehmeti have
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told us they believe the way out of the current impasse is for the GOM to accept a real political dialogue that would address and resolve issues of key concern for DUI. Those issues include the composition of the parliamentary Committee for Inter-Ethnic Relations (reftel); giving DUI a role in negotiating the language to be included in a law on languages; compiling a list of laws that would require a Badinter (qualified majority) vote; and amending the constitution to require the composition of future governments according to the Badinter principle.

17. (C) Comment: Some of the Arifi/Mehmeti proposals are non-starters, given the current negative political climate here; however, it is possible Gruevski would consider giving DUI a role in drafting a language law, and perhaps would agree to compiling a list of laws requiring Badinter votes. The larger challenge for DUI is to define, both internally and publicly, its criteria for success in pursuing the current course of action. DUI leader Ahmeti, a stubborn political tactician, does not seem ready to take that step yet. The equally stubborn Gruevski seems determined not to give DUI any space on the political scene. End comment.)

SOCIAL DEMOCRATS: WEAKENED BY INTERNECINE WARFARE

18. (C) With DUI out of the Parliament, the only potentially viable opposition party, eMacedonian SDSM, is a house divided and in disarray. Former Prime Minister Buckovski, now an SDSM MP, has engaged in open warfare with recently elected SDSM President Radmila Sekerinska and her foot soldiers, trading insults and public accusations of incompetence, or worse. In a January 29 meeting, Sekerinska told the Ambassador that Buckovski had maintained silence for several weeks after the party's November 2006 extraordinary congress, when she was elected President and as he was being considered for an ambassadorship to NATO, but had turned up the volume after the latter initiative failed.

19. (SBU) In the face of strong opposition from Sekerinska and her supporters, Buckovski has proposed that SDSM accept official factions within the party, which would entitle them

to guaranteed seats and party funding; direct elections for party positions; and an increase in the number of members on SDSM's central board. Comment: If adopted, those proposals would effectively neuter the party by dividing unity of command and by eventually pitting Buckovski against Sekerinska and her mentor, President Crvenkovski. End comment.

¶10. (C) Sekerinska told the Ambassador she believes that accepting Buckovski's demands would only result in more demands, and that the party instead needs to focus on rebuilding itself and its platform as an opposition force. She acknowledged that Buckovski might lead his SDSM supporters to vote with the government on some issues, and said her goal was to retain at least 18 of SDSM's current 23 MP seats. She projected that it would take at least one year to rebuild SDSM as a viable political party capable of winning a national election.

PRIME MINISTER AND PRESIDENT ENGAGE IN UGLY VERBAL SPARRING

¶11. (C) With DUI disengaged and the Social Democrats in disarray, the perennial battle between Prime Minister and President in Macedonia (reftel) has heated up. After Gruevski and his cabinet failed to show up for Crvenkovski's "state of the union" speech in December, intramural tensions began to increase. Gruevski did attend National Security Council meeting hosted by Crvenkovski immediately after the parliamentary elections in Serbia, but nearly overturned the government's carefully-crafted position on Kosovo final status when he proposed asking for additional security guarantees for Macedonia in the context of the status process. Crvenkovski was able to get Gruevski to withdraw the proposal, but Gruevski has nursed a grudge since then. That became evident after Crvenkovski, in NATO and EU meetings in Brussels this week, received serious criticism from de Hoop Scheffer and Barroso about the government's and opposition's failure to create a mature political dialogue here. Gruevski's PR staff immediately jumped into action, publicly accusing the President (and Sekerinska, for good measure) of harming Macedonia by criticizing the GOM as being responsible for NATO's and the EU's criticisms, and of having undermined the GOM's NATO and EU membership efforts.

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COMMENT -- AN END TO THE PUGILISM

¶12. (C) There does not seem to be any easy way to cut the Gordian knot the government and opposition each have helped to tie. Gruevski, an amateur boxer in his youth, seems emboldened by his relatively high poll ratings, DUI's absence from the ring, and SDSM's wobbly legs. He believes he can shadowbox his way through the remaining reform challenges ahead and into NATO by 2008, relying on his hefty parliamentary majority to ram through legislation. Our message to the Prime Minister is that he needs viable opponents in the ring to make his efforts credible, and that he needs to take DUI seriously as a political force representing the majority of eAlbanian voters. Our message to DUI is for them to get back in the ring where they belong as the party elected to represent eAlbanian interests in the Parliament, and to demonstrate their seriousness as contenders for a constructive role in influencing FWA-related legislation. SDSM will probably remain on the sidelines until their wounds heal, which could take much of the rest of the year. That could be too late for them to make a positive contribution to the political battles being fought in this critical year for Macedonia's NATO membership aspirations. MILOVANOVIC